DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 163 CS 211 031

AUTHOR Raines, Helon Howell
TITLE Writing Programs in the Two-Year School: The Center Holds.
PUB DATE Aug 87
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Council of Writing Program Administrators (Logan, UT, August 5-7, 1987) and at the Annual Meeting of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association (October 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Higher Education; *Program Content; Program Effectiveness; Teaching Methods; Two Year Colleges; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Laboratories; Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS Casper College WY

ABSTRACT

Drawing upon information gathered in a survey of eight two-year colleges and one four-year college, this paper discusses the status of writing within the two-year college system. Following introductory remarks, the paper gives a brief profile of one two-year college, Casper College in Wyoming, including data about its background, curriculum, faculty, support services, openness to experimentation, and administration. The paper next compares Casper College with the other schools surveyed, revealing more similarities than differences in faculty, support services, and curriculum. It indicates that most of the schools have writing programs that consist of two levels of composition, along with a basic writing course or advanced writing course, and that all had other courses such as technical or creative writing. The paper then compares school administrations, finding that most of the schools have few administrators and that many of the administrators also teach. An explanation of why this is so follows, with a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the situation. The paper concludes with the observation that writing programs in the two-year college are healthy and continuing, and then discusses the effect of such writing programs on university programs. (FL)

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WRITING PROGRAMS IN THE TWO-YEAR SCHOOL: THE CENTER HOLDS

by

Helon Howell Raines, Ph.D
Casper College
125 College Drive
Casper, Wyoming 82601

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WRITING PROGRAMS IN THE TWO-YEAR SCHOOL: THE CENTER HOLDS

Last spring when a colleague at another school invited me to participate in a Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association special session she planned on writing programs, my immediate response was that we didn't have a writing program at Casper College, the two-year college where I teach. The silence on the other end of the line could not have announced any more loudly my friend's incredulity, and instantly I realized how ridiculous my answer must sound to a person who too often had heard me expound about the numerous and varied writing courses I teach. Of course, given a few minutes to think, I agreed that we do have a writing program at Casper College, and, indeed, I would welcome the opportunity to talk about writing programs in two-year schools.

However, my initial response made me reflect about why I felt that way and whether or not my reaction was unique or if others in two-year schools had a similar perspective. Those questions led me to survey seven community colleges and one four-year school as well as to have my own faculty complete a questionnaire about ourselves and our department. From this material, I learned that my reaction was not unusual, and I concluded that this sense that the two-year school does not have a "writing program" exists for several reasons.

WHY? ONE REASON: WE ARE AN ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

First, and perhaps most significantly, in most community colleges, the people who teach writing also are the people who teach literature, and so we see ourselves as an English Department where we teach primarily writing and only a little literature. In fact, if I use Yeat's poem "The Second Coming" as a metaphor for higher education, and risk torturing a comparison beyond what it can endure, people in two-year programs would say that in their English Departments the center is writing and that center has held in the past and will hold in the future. Actually, for a long time, many of us were unaware that anarchy had been loosed upon the world since in our departments there is no breach between literature people and writing people because the writing people are the literature people.

NOT A PLANNED CURRICULUM: WE HAVE NO MAJORS

The second reason we don't see our programs as writing programs is, although we teach primarily writing, we do not teach these courses as part of a planned curriculum for a writing or English major. In addition to having few majors in English, much less in writing, we obviously don't have a graduate writing program either. Without a program designed for majors, then, our purpose is divided. As one of my colleagues said, we see one responsibility to help writers discover that they are meaning makers and then to help them discover the joy of making meaning. Yet, we also see another purpose - to provide a service to other departments, and for this purpose our primary objective is to produce writers who have achieved certain levels of writing ability. While the two things are not incompatible, having two

central purposes does perhaps blur our vision about our identity. Only two department chairs with whom I spoke could say definitely that one or the other of these purposes was the principal one. However, none of us has any problem recognizing that our English program is anchored in what most of us teach most of the time, writing.

THE SURVEYS

This report on two-year writing programs is based on my experience at Casper College, on my survey at Casper College, as well as on my survey of other schools. Certainly I recognize that because of the limited sampling, the survey of community colleges is not necessarily representative and certainly not conclusive although I tried to include various sized schools from across the country, and I am in the process of expanding this research. However, I believe, in spite of its being limited to a few schools, the survey demonstrates some significant differences between the actual situation in many community college English departments and the stereotypic image some people have of community college writing programs and faculty.

In this paper I first will give a brief profile of Casper College. Then I would like to discuss the similarities and differences between Casper College and other schools I surveyed. Next I will cover the administration of these schools, the reasons we have the type of administrations we have, which overall is administration by committee, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of teaching writing or studying writing in the community college. Finally, I will conclude with a few comments

about the future of two-year programs and my view of how writing departments in two-year schools could affect programs in four-year colleges and in universities.

(Or if you choose to omit the information on Casper College which serves primarily to describe community colleges by discussing one that is fairly typical, the thesis would be, In this paper then I will discuss the similarities and differences among the colleges I surveyed in relation to curriculum and loads, support services, faculty, and administration. Then I will discuss the future of two-year programs and my view of how writing departments in two-year schools could affect programs in four-year colleges and in universities.)

PROFILE OF CASPER COLLEGE

Casper College is located in Casper, Wyoming, a town of 50,000 in a state with a total population of 470,000, in the good times. In Fall Semester, 1987, Casper College had a record enrollment with the full time equivalency of 2905.5 students and a head count of 4347. The total number includes 334 students in the University of Wyoming/Casper College Center, an upper-level program which shares some faculty, many students and utilizes the physical facilities of the Casper College. The average age of students at Casper College is 31, although the average age of those with declared majors is 24. Wyoming has an open admission policy, and students are from small towns and small high schools although many have been in good college preparatory courses. (At Casper College, among those who have taken the ACT, the average composite score is 17.5 with an average high school grade point of 2.5.) Fifty-nine per cent of the students at CC are women, and

ninety-six per cent are Caucasian. Because of the recession in Wyoming, many who would have attended a university now begin in community colleges. We also have a large percentage of people retraining for new careers.

COURSES AND TEACHING LOADS

At Casper College, we teach a variety of writing courses, in fact, more different writing courses that most schools I surveyed. We have a two-semester composition sequence, plus one writing course below college level. We also offer advanced composition, sophomore composition, technical writing and creative writing. In addition, we have a learning lab, which includes developmental courses in reading and writing. In most semesters, we have between 750 and 850 students in composition but we hold writing sections to 20 to 25. Twelve contact hours, or four courses, is the normal load for the writing faculty, and most people teach something besides composition.

FACULTY

Ten faculty members teach primarily composition. The English Department also includes a full-time reading specialist and a director of the developmental skills lab which also includes one part-time faculty and a staff person. The two full-time faculty teach some composition. Two foreign language instructors also teach some composition, so, with this flexibility among those who can teach composition, we have only three adjunct faculty in any given semester. Of the fourteen people who teach primarily writing, four have Ph.D.s; one an Ed.D., one has two masters and the rest have masters plus at

least fifteen hours. Among these fourteen, nine are women, five are men, and our average age is forty-seven. With only a three percent turnover among the faculty, we have an average of thirteen years teaching at Casper College and seventeen years of full-time teaching. Although at times everyone complains about teaching so many writing students and we express some frustration about the poor attitudes of many younger students, most of the faculty indicate a high degree of job satisfaction. Either we really are sailing in smooth waters or we are becalmed and don't know we should be searching the clouds for signs of the coming wind.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Part of the reason we seem to be tacking along so smoothly is because we have good waters on which to sail. Our support services and physical facilities are excellent. Besides the developmental lab, which this year will begin a program in peer tutoring, we also have several well-equipped computer labs. One of these is primarily an English lab with twenty-two IBM PCs. I have used the lab for classes for the last two semesters and three other people plan to begin to do so in Spring, 1988.

OPENNESS TO EXPERIMENTATION

While none of the CC faculty has a degree in composition and rhetoric, we are active in the writing profession and as a department well informed about both traditional and more recent theories of teaching composition. Many in the department use process in teaching composing while several others continue with product-centered courses. On a scale of one to ten in

experimentation, we would be solidly in the center with about a five or six. Over all, our approach is conservative.

ADMINISTRATION AT CC

The administration of the English Department is simple and basic. We have only one administrator, the Chair of the Division of Language and Literature. This Division includes foreign language, journalism, communications, philosophy, literature and humanities, and we have about 20 people in the Division. The Chair teaches 2/3 of a regular teaching load, gets one extra month's pay, and is responsible for budget, schedules, evaluations, and liaison between faculty and administration. The Chair rotates, and, during the twelve years I have been at Casper College, three of the chairs have been in English, one in foreign language and the new Chair is in communications. Unlike many community colleges I surveyed, we do not have a department chair or a writing co-ordinator although we have discussed this possibility. The department meets regularly to discuss issues of curriculum, course content, as well as to share ideas about pedagogy and philosophy.

COMPARISON OF CURRICULUM, TEACHING LOADS, SUPPORT SERVICES, ADJUNCT FACULTY

In many ways, the community colleges I surveyed were remarkably similar. First of all, in most of the schools the writing program curriculum consists of two levels of composition, plus a basic writing course or an advanced writing course or both. All programs have several other writing courses such as technical writing, and less frequently, creative writing. All schools report good support services, and all have developmental

programs, except Metro in Denver which is the only four-year college in the survey. All schools have some kind of computer assisted instruction, many use computers in the writing class, and most have writing centers with peer and faculty tutors. About half the schools saw their mission as service; the rest felt it was mixed although at least two said they felt the service component was secondary to the mission of developing communication skills for enhancement of living as well as for professional competence. The schools I surveyed also have similar numbers of writing students per faculty, although usually the larger the school the more writing students each faculty has. For instance, Northwest Community College in Powell, Wyoming, with an fte of 1500 has only 22 students per class and each faculty member teaches only three writing courses and has at least one literature class or a total of about 65 writing students while Alameda College in San Francisco with close to 4,000 fte has 40 in a section with an average of four writing sections for each faculty. However, most schools hold comp sections to between 25 and 30, and in one half of the schools, each faculty teaches five classes, while in the other half, the faculty teaches four. The average number of students per faculty in the nine schools is about 110 at the beginning of the semester, and the average number of classes is 4.6. Furthermore, most schools have enough full-time faculty to take care of 75-95% of the composition courses. Schools in urban areas, typically, have more adjunct faculty and more faculty teach primarily composition. However, only one community college of the eight

has more adjunct than full time faculty; the only other school which has more adjunct than regular faculty is Metropolitan State University. All of the rest of the schools have many fewer adjunct than full time. However, I am aware that this is not true in all community colleges. Some do have programs staffed primarily by adjunct faculty and some do teach as many as six sections, but those situations do not exist among the majority of the two-year schools in this survey.

FACULTY

In addition to similarities in teaching loads, I also found a surprising similarity in the faculty profile as well as in the average age of students who generally are in mid to late twenties, reflecting the large number of adult learners in all places I surveyed. Most schools also report they have more female than male students. Among the faculties, most also are older; the average is in the mid-forties with about ten to fifteen years full-time teaching. Most schools have very low turnovers and most schools report, with early retirement programs, one half to two-thirds of the faculty will be eligible to retire in the next ten years. All schools report an average educational level of masters plus 15-30. While almost all departments have some Ph.D.s, I was surprised there are not more with the dire job situation for people in English for the last ten years. Fewer Ph.D.s, however, probably reflect few openings, a reluctance of some small colleges to hire Ph.D.s, as well as the reluctance of Ph.Ds to take positions in community colleges. All schools report high faculty morale and job satisfaction which occurs at least in part because of the administrative structures.

ADMINISTRATION

I believe I was most surprised, although I am not certain why, with the similarity in administrations. All schools report that they have few administrators, and all administrators teach although I am aware that this is not the case in all community colleges. All schools also report that they decide major departmental issues in committee. Even where a writing coordinator is in place, the position rotates, the coordinator usually volunteers and is responsible for organizing meetings, agendas and developing in-service training. Small schools, such as Western Community College in Rock Springs, Wy., even settle budgets, schedules, and very detailed administrative matters by committee. In every case, the schools report the faculty has a strong sense of collegiality and finds job satisfaction because of the professionalism of their colleagues, because of the faculties' autonomy in the classroom and because the faculty has control in curriculum decisions.

THE REASONS FOR THIS STRUCTURE

The reasons for structures that have few administrators and give significant representation to faculty are fairly apparent. First, the numbers of people teaching in the program make administration by committee possible and successful. In addition, of course, we have no graduate students, so we have few inexperienced teachers to supervise. In fact, the most obvious reason for administration by representation is that an older, more experienced faculty does not want, need, nor will it tolerate, supervision. This faculty has a solid body of

knowledge on which to direct by committee and in this way satisfies the faculty desire for control in curriculum matters. Furthermore, half of the programs do not have common course outlines and often not even common texts, so these committees determine only a minimalist set of guidelines for composition classes. For instance, at Casper College students write 5,000 to 10,000 words per semester, but some instructors may require ten, two-page essays while others have four or five papers which include developing and organizing ideas, multiple drafts and written and oral critiques from other students. These abbreviated recommendations for conducting freshman composition courses work well enough with an experienced faculty although they do not provide any focus for a unified writing program and serve primarily to define general standards and common requirements. This leads me to the last area of the body of my discussion. What are the advantages and disadvantages of teaching writing in a two-year program?

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES: A MIXED BAG

While people in my division believe it is an advantage to have fewer administrators, we also sometimes feel we are overloaded with administrative responsibilities. Another concern is that students cannot move readily from one instructor to the other where there is so much diversity in texts, methods and course structure. And the students may be confused when exposed to many different methods, going, let's say, from a process-oriented classroom to a product-centered course. Some people, however, claim this variety in approach is actually an advantage. When I envision our courses and our teaching methods

at CC, I think of the windward leg of a sailboat race when all the boats tack off in different directions so they look like they aren't even in the same race. Yet, generally, most of the boats reach the finish line about the same time, in about the same condition, with most of the crew still aboard. Furthermore, when we compare notes at CC to see if students in the second semester are prepared, we find that overall they are no matter what approach the previous instructor used.

In addition, the overall conservative philosophy of most community colleges also is both a strength and a concern. While most schools report that most of their faculty are involved in developing new approaches to teaching composition, many, of course, continue to teach in very traditional modes. For instance, most of the community colleges I surveyed continue to teach imaginative literature in some part of the composition sequence. So, while the cultural literacy argument rages all around, the community college instructor quietly continues to teach THE MERCHANT OF VENICE in Composition 102.

Another area where community colleges have similarity is that, because of their flexible structures, communications may be too limited particularly when the department head is from another area besides English. Minimal communication, an overall conservative attitude, and a heavy work load also make it difficult for us to develop programs we would like to have. For instance, some at CC have wanted to develop a writing across the curriculum program, but only last year did one instructor begin an interdisciplinary journal of student writing. In fact, in my

survey, Prince Georges Community College was the only community college with a well developed writing across the curriculum program.

Related to this point about limited time is the obvious disadvantage of having so many writing students that writers do not get as much attention as we would like. Heavy teaching loads also mean that even those who are interested in doing research may not. However, some people believe the emphasis on teaching, even to the exclusion of research, is a strength. Many feel more effective in teaching without the stress of publishing which for some is one factor that contributes to job satisfaction. A final point, which I would place on the negative ledger, occurs wherever people have a lot of freedom. Some instructors do become locked into a particular method, chosen perhaps out of fatigue or laziness rather than because it best fits her philosophy and style of teaching. On the other hand, as one department head explained, many faculty have gone through their experimentation phase and have developed a style and methodology that are best for them and the students who enroll in their classes.

I think the advantages of teaching in the typical community college are clear. The freedom to experiment without being bound into a rigid program can be positive for it means we can spontaneously make changes without waiting for departmental approval. As long as we don't end up with random disorder and meaningless chaos, or as long as the rate of entropy doesn't produce paralysis, this diversity should be positive. And the diversity does lend itself to experimentation, even among the

most conservative. In fact, I would argue that the most creative approaches to teaching writing occur in the small college classroom. As one colleague says, whenever you teach large numbers of writing student, survival does become the mother of invention. In fact, most faculty in community colleges believe that the writing instruction students receive with experienced teachers very often is superior to instruction in large colleges and universities which employ less experienced teaching assistants, teaching fellows and adjunct faculty and where the professorial staff teach writing infrequently, reluctantly, and sometimes ineffectively.

Another advantage of community college writing programs, which almost every Department Chair notes, is that faculty members are truly represented in the decision-making process, a process which is non-hierachical and egalitarian. Everyone at least has a voice if she wishes to use it. Furthermore, we do take pride in our teaching, and we think more times than not we do a good job. Overall, I believe it is fair to say that if the beast is slouching toward Bethelehem, we either are too far from Bethelehem to care or we just don't recognize a beast when we see one.

CONCLUSIONS

In trying to draw some conclusions from this overview of writing departments in two-year schools, I have considered two final questions. What is the future for the community college English Department and what effect does the community college writing program have on the University program? Overall, I think

the future is good although I must admit some "images...trouble my vision." On the bright side, we have for some time had the newest market in college enrollment, the older student. Most of these people are motivated and dedicated, and I believe their presence in growing numbers in our regular day classes improves the performance of our younger, more typically disinterested, 18 year olds, which I hope will elevate the performance and the standards in courses in community college. I believe that universities should see better prepared students emerging from community college programs, at least those where teachers have reasonable teaching loads. At CC we feel that our students are well prepared to go to any college or university; many return to tell us that this is true, but perhaps many of the others just never appear again. In fact, this subjective method of analyzing our performance itself is one of our weaknesses. Because of our limited facilities, we have been unable to follow our students to document how well we accomplish our goals. However, because of an increasing emphasis on accountability, even in Wyoming where the legislature historically is hesitant to impose requirements and restrictions, I think we soon will have to develop more objective information about the success of our programs.

RETIREMENT GLUT

Also in terms of the future, the figures I have compiled, as incomplete as they are, suggest that the community college will experience the predicted retirement glut. This situation certainly could have damaging effects on two-year schools since the best and the best-educated graduate students probably will teach in four-year schools and universities. Because we have

failed to secure a large number of Ph.D.s and ABDs in English when they were more readily available, we are unlikely to get them in the future. It also is unlikely we will secure many new faculty with formal education in composition and rhetoric. Furthermore, it is possible that some four-year schools may hire away from the community college to augment their newer faculty. In addition, the present stability or low turnover in many community college is, at least in my view, a problem, one which could be resolved by more faculty exchange programs.

HOW THE EMPHASIS ON COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC AFFECTS US

Finally, the new emphasis on scholarship in composition and rhetoric seems to be both positive and negative for two-year schools. It has brought more attention to what we have long known: the most important work in the academy is in the classroom with people who are attempting to develop reading, writing, and critical abilities. However, even though the community college writing faculty devise theories and create methodologies for teaching more to more students, we infrequently publish or promote our findings. Therefore, we don't have a position from which to create the language of the scholarship in a field about which we are knowledgeable. Without the power to name, without the power to create an impressive language for what we do, what we do may seem less impressive. Of course, we understand that without naming things precisely, we may not do the thing as precisely as we should. However, over the years, my colleagues and I have chuckled that what we have frequently done under another name is now being touted as some form of the new

rhetoric. For instance, group activity is collaborative learning; reading papers in class is publishing; working with sentence structures is sentence combining; evaluating files of revised papers is looking at a portfolio. And these, of course, are mild examples of my point. When our texts are dominated by "dialogics," "heurestics," and "hegemonies," we may be consciously or unconsciously creating a language of exclusion.

While I certainly respect precise language, many of us note the irony of inflating language to the point we sound as if we are imitating literary critics, at the same time we violate the very principles of good writing we teach: to be concise and natural, to use language to express not to impress. On the other hand, perhaps some of the new language <u>is</u> more imagistic and more precise than the language we have used for similar methodology. Indeed "portfolios" may be a clearer image of the kind of writing we seek than is the word "folder." Perhaps then the writing in the portfolio is more creative for the word <u>sounds</u> significant. Nonetheless, I think we must avoid creating an argot hoping to legitimize our work in the eyes of the dominant culture of the academy and in the process exclude all but the privileged few. We must, I think, keep the writing community open and insist on equal status for all of its citizens.

EFFECT ON UNIVERSITIES

In concluding, I'd like to consider the implications of writing programs in two-year schools for university writing programs. While the university certainly does some administration by committee, the committee system employed in

community colleges could not work in the same way in schools with large numbers of teaching assistants, teaching fellows, and lecturers. However, a common thread in the presentations at the Conference for Writing Program Administrators in Logan, Utah, in August, 1987, was the significance of devising structures which give all faculty a voice and a sense of worth whether they are teaching assistants, adjunct faculty or professional staff. I believe empowering by representation is a valid concept although the precise system obviously must vary with the situation and with those restrictions over which we have little control. I also would like to review some of the other implications of community college writing departments on universities.

One of these is the solid preparation of writing students who have taken composition in good community colleges. Another point I already have mentioned is that many universities will continue to use the extensive developmental programs in nearby community colleges. This will be valuable if those who teach are respected as valuable resources teaching in a program that is significant to the overall work of the department. A third point I also have mentioned, which may adversely affect community colleges, may help the universities in the retirement glut if universities draw on the experienced community college faculty. All of the explicit and implicit effects I have suggested, however, focus on one point - the community college can be a great resource for people teaching writing and teaching the teaching of writing. If community college instructors are given full status in the writing community, we will enrich the entire

endeavor. If we are excluded from the club or make to feel like second class citizens, the entire profession suffers. The ironies and implications of this point are compounded in a field which itself often is marginalized in the larger academic community.

WAYS TO UTILIZE THE EXPERTISE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY

I would like to suggest several specific ways to make the expertise of community college faculty more valuable and more available to the writing community. One is to increase what already is being done in collaborative projects between university and community college faculty. In the community college, we deal directly with great numbers of writing students and a great variety of students. Our opportunities to collect data and to observe and interpret from an experienced perspective in collaboration with those in universities who have more expertise in theory, perhaps less demanding teaching loads and more access to grants should produce significant scholarship. This collaboration also should extend to faculty exchange programs between community colleges and universities, a system which we are exploring with the University of Wyoming/Casper College Center.

The third specific thing we can do to enhance the value of the community college program to the university is what I have experienced in presenting this material at two conferences, the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association special session on writing programs and the Writing Program Administrators Conference. Having the opportunity to talk to writing teachers

and administrators as equals is the kind of communication which may lead to more collaboration, but, more important, it surely will lead to an enriched community of writing teachers. I appreciate my colleague at the Colorado School of Mines, Barbara Olds, bringing together people from different segments of the writing community for her special session at RMMLA, and I also am gratified that WPA wanted to include material from community colleges for their program. However, in addition to such presentations, more publication of the work of community college faculty in journals which reach beyond the community college audience also could develop an extensive and substantial dialogue. Sharing information surely is one good way to "maintain our passion" and to "increase our conviction" for the thing we all attempt to do, helping others discover and express meaning. Sharing also is one more way to keep the writing center strong at all levels of higher education.